Eliminate Wordiness

What is Wordiness?

Definition: Wordiness is when a writer uses more words than necessary to express a thought. Readers find wordy papers difficult to follow.

Here is an example a wordy definition: The situation of wordiness is one in which writers attempt to use several different words or extravagant words in the place of a few, well-chosen, concise, words. This results in unnecessary confusion and annoyance on the part of the reader.

What causes wordiness?

1. Wordiness is a result of idea generation. Most people write wordy sentences and paragraphs when they are writing their early drafts and their ideas are flowing. In final drafts, however, writers need to reread their drafts, and revise the sentences that appear too wordy.

2. Many people write wordy papers because they are trying to make their ideas sound important by using long words and intricate sentences. They think that their writing must be complicated to seem intelligent. Although these writers are trying to impress their readers, they often end up confusing them. The best writing is clear, concise, and easy to understand.

3. When a writer can't find the "perfect" word, s/he often ends up putting a long phrase in its place. Some wordiness, then, is the result of a writer's frustration at not being able to find that perfect word that expresses the thought of the writer.

4. Finally, passive sentences and other constructions that hide the subject are often wordy. For example, the passive sentence "The cookies were eaten by the child" has many more words than the active sentence "The child ate the cookies." A paper full of passive sentences results in having a paper full of wordiness.

Tips to avoid wordiness:

1. Revise! Do not be afraid to be wordy when you are writing your draft. Write down all you that you need to write down. Then, in revision, go through your paper carefully, cutting unnecessary sentences, phrases, and words.

2. Keep it simple! You don't need to make your ideas sound complex. Say what you mean completely but concisely; your readers will be able to understand your paper much better.

3. Read your paper aloud! Most people don't speak in a wordy way, so when you are reading it aloud and you find that it sounds wordy, revise it.

4. Avoid passive constructions! Instead of writing “The papers were graded by the teacher,” it is much less confusing to write “The teacher graded the papers.”